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Title: Venezuela, the Revival of Regime Change Author: William D. Hartung

The Venezuela Campaign and the Capture of President Maduro

The Trump administration's exercise in armed regime change in Venezuela should have come as no surprise. The U.S. naval buildup in the Caribbean and the attacks on defenseless boats off the Venezuelan coast, based on unproven allegations that they contained drug traffickers, had been underway for more than three months. By the end of December 2025, such strikes on boats near Venezuela and in the Eastern Pacific had already killed 115 people.

These attacks were just the beginning. The U.S. has since intercepted oil tankers as far away as the North Atlantic Ocean, run a covert operation inside Venezuela, and earlier this month, launched multiple air strikes that killed at least 40 Venezuelans while capturing that country's president, Nicholas Maduro, and his wife. Both of them are now imprisoned in New York City and poised to face a criminal trial for narco-terrorism and cocaine importing conspiracies, plus assorted weapons charges. Even more strikingly, President Donald Trump recently told the New York Times that the U.S. could run Venezuela for years, though he did not offer a clue on how that would be done.

The Red Flags of Historical Failure

Trump's rush to war in Latin America is a phenomenon that, until recently, seemed long over. Its revival should raise multiple red flags, given the history of Washington's failed efforts to install allied governments through regime change. Given this country's lack of success with such attempts since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, it is a good bet that regime change in Venezuela will not end well for any of the parties concerned, whether the Trump administration, the new leaders of Venezuela, or the people of our two countries.

The reach of this policy may extend beyond Venezuela. Trump has already suggested that he might entertain the idea of launching military strikes on neighboring Colombia. Following a White House phone call with President Gustavo Petro, there is speculation that the next targets might be Cuba, Mexico, Greenland, or even Iran. It remains unclear whether the administration will use the U.S. military, CIA-style covert action, economic warfare, or a combination of these methods in pursuit of their goals.

Imperial Nostalgia and the Donroe Doctrine

Pursuing global regime-change campaigns is described by the source as sheer madness. Such a path sows chaos and instability while harming innocent civilians in a futile quest for renewed U.S. global supremacy. While the term Make America Great Again once suggested a return to the 1950s—a period of economic growth that also featured McCarthyism and significant prejudice—Trump's current fixation on grabbing territory suggests a desire to take America back to the 1850s.

This hyper-militarized interpretation of the 200-year-old Monroe Doctrine, now dubbed the Donroe Doctrine, marks a return to imperial nostalgia. This attempt to control Latin America is not new. In the early twentieth century, Teddy Roosevelt announced a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, asserting an international police power to justify U.S. intervention in Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Historically, the United States intervened in the Western Hemisphere to change governments 41 times from 1898 to 1994, with 17 of those cases involving direct military intervention.

The Economic and Human Cost of Occupation

Although officials are celebrating the removal of Nicolás Maduro, the battle is far from over. Past experiences, such as the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, demonstrate the dangers of wishful thinking. The Iraq War, initially predicted to be a cake walk costing 50 to 100 billion dollars, lasted 20 years and cost over 1 trillion dollars. It resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and left hundreds of thousands of U.S. military personnel killed, maimed, or suffering from PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injuries.

The opportunity costs are staggering. The Costs of War Project at Brown University estimates that taxpayer obligations from post-9/11 conflicts exceeded 8 trillion dollars. This sum would have been sufficient to:

1. Decarbonize the entire U.S. electrical grid.
2. Forgive all U.S. student-loan debt.
3. Triple the investment in green energy.

Continuing a policy of regional domination through force will exact a high price on Americans in need of food, housing, education, and a robust public health system.

Oil, Ego, and the Illusion of a Quick Victory

The original rationale for the Venezuela intervention—stopping the flow of drugs—did not stand up to scrutiny, as Venezuela is not a significant source of fentanyl. Donald Trump has since stated repeatedly that the intervention was actually about seizing Venezuela's oil resources. He envisions large United States oil companies spending billions of dollars to fix broken infrastructure and make money for the country.

However, this plan faces severe economic and geological realities. Venezuela's oil consists mostly of heavy crude, which is difficult to extract, and the infrastructure is decrepit after years of sanctions and neglect. Experts suggest it would take tens of billions of dollars over multiple years to restore production. Beyond oil, the intervention satisfies a personal will to power and serves the goal of weakening the government of Cuba by denying it Venezuelan oil.

The Path to Restraint and National Strength

The Venezuelan debacle is seen as a sign that tough-guy rhetoric and bullying policies are accelerating the decline of American global power. U.S. dominance has often been overrated, as seen in fiascos in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, where the U.S. could not impose its will on smaller nations.

The source argues for a shift toward a policy of restraint and smart diplomacy. If Washington were to put down its sword and invest in the foundations of national strength—a healthy, well-educated, and unified population—it could play a more constructive role in the world. This would involve a smaller military budget, freeing up resources to address urgent needs such as climate change, preventing pandemics, and reducing poverty. Striving for a less militarized America is presented as the only way out of the current predicament.

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